

CLAIMS:

1. A valve for a gas tank comprising a rotatable control stem capable of activating an element for opening or closing the valve, and a control wheel operable to turn the control stem so as to open or close the valve; the control wheel being axially movable on the control stem between a first axial position in which the control wheel and control stem are coupled together such that rotational movement of the control wheel causes a corresponding rotational movement of the control stem, and a second axial position, in which the control wheel and stem are uncoupled from each other and the wheel can turn freely on the stem without causing any rotational movement of the stem; the valve further including an elastic retainer provided between the wheel and the stem to retain the wheel in an elastic manner in one or the other of the two positions on the stem; the wheel being axially displaceable on the stem between its two axial positions by the application of a predetermined axial force on the wheel sufficient to overcome the retaining force of the elastic retainer.

2. The valve according to claim 1, wherein the control wheel has a non-circular internal part, and the control stem has an external part of corresponding geometric shape; wherein, in the first axial position, the internal part of the wheel is engaged with said external part of the stem so as to cause transmission of a rotational motion from the wheel to the stem, and the two parts are axially disengaged from each other in the second axial position of the wheel handle.

3. The valve according to claim 1, wherein the elastic retainer comprises two circumferential grooves that are separated axially from each other on the external circumferential surface of the stem, and at least one pin mounted in a radial hole in the

control wheel; the pin being biased radially inwardly by an elastic ring in the wheel with a view to engaging in one or the other of said grooves to maintain the wheel elastically in one or the other of these axial positions; the axial displacement of the wheel from one of these two positions on the stem towards its other position causing radial disengagement of the pin from one of the two grooves against the elastic force of the ring, and then the radial engagement of the pin in the other groove under the effect of the ring's elasticity.

4. The valve according to claim 3 wherein the radial receiving hole of the pin in the control wheel opens to the exterior in an annular groove present in the external circumference of the wheel, the elastic ring being inserted in said groove.

5. The valve according to claim 3 wherein the elastic ring is a toric ring of elastomeric material.

6. The valve according to claim 3 wherein the valve includes a plurality of said pins; said pins being equidistant from each other in the circumferential direction of the control wheel.

7. The valve according to claim 1 including a stop to limit axial displacement of the wheel on the stem in both directions beyond the first position and beyond the second position.

8. The valve according to claim 1 including a stop to prevent separation of the wheel from the control stem.